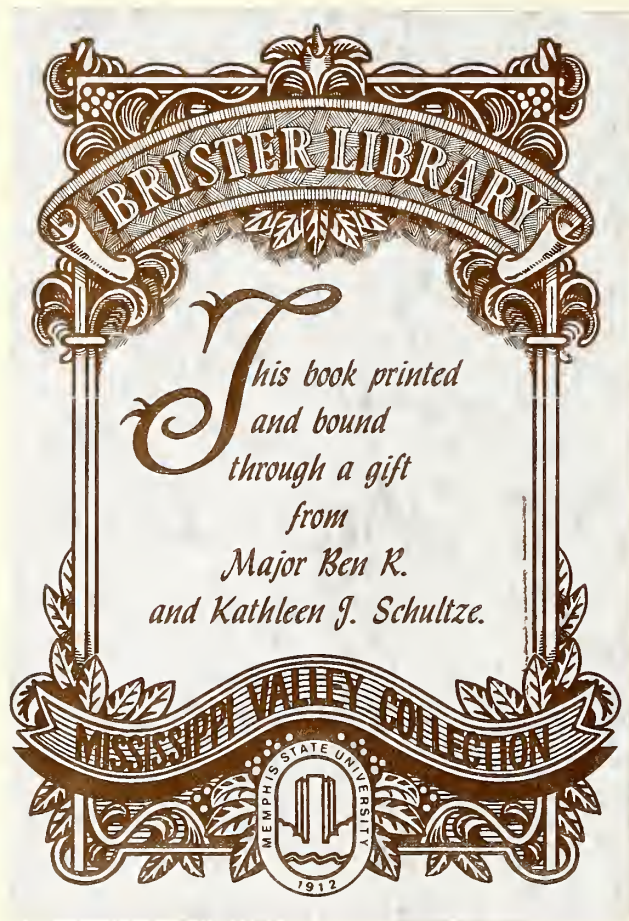


ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY
INTERVIEWS WITH
VIRGINIA WHITE JAMES

BY - CHARLES W. CRAWFORD
TRANSCRIBER - BETTY WILLIAMS
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE
MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY



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ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY

INTERVIEWS WITH VIRGINIA WHITE JAMES

MARCH 9, 1973

BY CHARLES W. CRAWFORD

TRANSCRIBER - BETTY WILLIAMS

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE

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PLACE

Northport, Alabama

DATE

March 9, 1973

Virginia White James
(Interviewee)

Charles W. Crawford
(For the Mississippi Valley Archives
of the John Willard Brister Library
of Memphis State University)

come to Smith College on a scholarship first and then on the assistantship to do graduate work. I spent two years at Smith College taking my Master's Degree. Following that, I did county supervision work in North Carolina and Alabama. I was in this work in Talladega, Alabama at the time that TVA invited me to become principal of the Wilson Dam School.

DR. CRAWFORD: What year was that, Miss James?

MISS JAMES: In 1934. After the Wilson Dam school was closed, I went to the Central Office in Knoxville as General Supervisor of the elementary schools--really a specialist in elementary education, and a little later as specialist in educational methods and educational relations.

DR. CRAWFORD: May I ask you a few questions about your first contact with TVA in 1934. Where were you when you received the offer and how did TVA find out about your work?

DR. CRAWFORD: TVA had found out about my work through the State Department of Education in Alabama and Mr. L. E. Creel, who was then Superintendent of the Sheffield schools, and had the responsibility of the school the first year in 1933. When they decided that they needed to have a principal for a larger school because of the great influx of workers and TVA's taking over the War Department facilities there--the fertilizer plant, and the dam and the power house and so on--they decided to expand the school. And through the State Department of Education I was recommended to Mr. Creel and he

in turn suggested me to TVA.

Now where I was during the summer--the month of August---in fact, I happened to be in Chicago at the World Fair at that time I got the telegram from Mr. Gordon Clapp.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, that was in August, of '34?

MISS JAMES: So I stopped in Knoxville for my interview with Mr. Clapp on my way back from Chicago and decided to undertake the project when it was described to me. We could develop a school along the lines that we would like to do. So I was allowed to get the year's work started in Talladega--the county supervisor there. Then I went to Wilson Dam.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, you were working as County supervisor in Talladega just prior to taking the TVA job?

MISS JAMES: That is true.

DR. CRAWFORD: How long had you been doing that work?

MISS JAMES: Five years.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you feel you had sufficient notice, being informed of this in August?

MISS JAMES: Mr. McBride, my superintendant in Talladega was very generous about it and we were able to get a very competent replacement to take over my work in Talladega. So it was all worked out very harmoniously.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have any experience in your work in

Talladega that helped you in your work with
TVA?

MISS JAMES: Well, I had responsibility for a supervision
of instruction for the entire county--partic-
ularly for the elementary schools.

DR. CRAWFORD: May we go back a little for a few questions
Miss James, before we go any further?

Why did you decide to go into education?

MISS JAMES: Truth of the matter is I thought I would be
a lawyer, but my father was a lawyer. I don't
know. It was sort of the easy thing to do and I became more and more inter-
ested as time went on. I taught and went to school. In fact, even when I
was at Milligan College I did some teaching because Milligan had the con-
tracts for the local schools. That is the way I earned my way through
college part of the time.

DR. CRAWFORD: What subjects did you teach? Was it elementary
school subjects?

MISS JAMES: I had sixth grade.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you decide to go into education while
you were at Milligan College?

MISS JAMES: Well, it is not very hard for me to say, but
I imagine so. Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: And what did you study when you were at the
University of Tennessee?

MISS JAMES: Just the regular curriculum for a Bachelor of Arts Degree.

DR. CRAWFORD: In education. Were you preparing to teach?

MISS JAMES: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, wasn't it unusual for someone in Tennessee to go to Smith College to study?

MISS JAMES: Well, I had that fine opportunity of working with Dr. Townsend, who was head of the Department of Education at Smith College.

DR. CRAWFORD: Why was he recruiting students in the South? That was unusual for Smith, wasn't it?

MISS JAMES: Well, not especially, I don't think. He was a very wonderful person, a very able person, and I owe a great deal to him.

DR. CRAWFORD: He must have been impressed with your record at the University of Tennessee. Or they must have been impressed to recommend you to him.

MISS JAMES: Well, I had worked with him and had classes with him.

DR. CRAWFORD: And he had an opportunity to meet you there.

MISS JAMES: So he knew something of what my ambitions were, I guess.

DR. CRAWFORD: And your Master's at Smith was in education?

MISS JAMES: Oh yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was it in a certain specialty in education?

MISS JAMES: I had a concentration of elementary education.

The truth of the matter is that at the time I was quite interested in special education and the historical background of the whole story of education. Then I went into the supervision in North Carolina and, of course, I learned a great deal all along the way. But I had, I feel, sufficient background to have done that work in North Carolina.

DR. CRAWFORD: As a matter of fact you have never stopped learning, have you?

MISS JAMES: I hope not. (Laughter)

DR. CRAWFORD: How long were you in North Carolina?

MISS JAMES: Two years.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was your position there?

MISS JAMES: County Supervisor of Schools.

DR. CRAWFORD: And that was the work that you took when you transferred to Taladega County?

MISS JAMES: To Talladega County. I was with the TVA a total of fifteen years. After the closing of the Wilson Dam School I went to the Central Office and was there until 1950 when I came to the University of Alabama as Professor of Elementary Education.

DR. CRAWFORD: Let's try taking your TVA experience then generally in two parts. First your experience at the school, and then your experience in Knoxville.

MISS JAMES: Well, in the capacity in Knoxville, I worked with teacher education institutions of the seven valley states. We were interested in getting an emphasis on resource-use education throughout the school program.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you were working, of course, with Alabama along with the other states?

MISS JAMES: Yes, that is true.

DR. CRAWFORD: Shall we go into your work at the Wilson School first before we get to the other part?

MISS JAMES: Yes. Well, as you know we have already mentioned, the school was really established in 1933. There were only three teachers and they were using the school building which had been used during World War I in Village One. When it was decided that they needed to expand and the local agencies were not able to take care of the children, TVA decided to establish a larger school. The first plan was to build a ten-room school in Village Two. When Dr. Maurice Seay, who was an assistant at that time to Dr. Floyd Reeves in the TVA, met with the Principal. We realized that there was a large building in Village One which with a little bit of refurbishing and remodeling could be made into quite an ideal school home. So the plans for building this new school building were abandoned and TVA decided to remodel the old officer's barracks which had been used by unmarried officers in World War I. They put the elementary school in that building.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know when that decision was made?

MISS JAMES: In 1934.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know when the renovation started?

MISS JAMES: Well, the renovation really went on and expanded the building in terms of our needs over the whole period of the seven years. Well, not at the last three years, of course. But as we say possibilities the TVA was very fine in cooperating and making the building the sort of school home that we would like to have. It was beautifully located--the school was. There was a large expanse of land and just back of the building was a dry creek bed which divided our school building lawn from a wooded hillside. This gave a lovely environment particularly for science interest and that sort of thing.

DR. CRAWFORD: What shape was it when you first went to the school?

MISS JAMES: It was made habitable for us. There were two very large lobbies. First of all the school had two levels. You went from the front onto the ground and at the back of the building you stepped out onto the ground and there was a large lobby in the center of the building on both levels and then back of these lobbies were large porches which we felt were very enhancing. Then the smaller apartments had partitions that were broken out and made very lovely classrooms with plenty of light and two baths rooms to each school room.

DR. CRAWFORD: When did you arrive there? Was it September of 1934?

MISS JAMES: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: What time did the school year start at that time?

MISS JAMES: I can't give you the exact date. I don't remember.

DR. CRAWFORD: /But you arrived before it did start?

MISS JAMES: Oh yes, we did some planning. We had to assemble a staff, you see. We were very fortunate in having contacts which helped us get a very outstanding staff. We never could have had the school we had had it not been for our staff. They were recommended for by such educators as Miss Lucy Gage at Peabody, Dr. Lars Zerbes of Ohio State University, Dr. Lewis Mossman at Columbia University and Dr. Alice Killehur of New York University--all had Masters Degrees and all had valuable teaching experience--most of them in demonstration schools in teacher education institutions. These people were really employed by the Training Division of the TVA with the approval of the Principal, and as we added staff later, also of the staff. So we were very very fortunate in that respect. Now these outstanding teachers were interested in coming to us because they realized that they would be able to do the things that they believed in. We had very close contact with these various outstanding educators in the country who helped us to recruit these very excellent teachers.

DR. CRAWFORD: Let me talk to you a little more about the staffing of school. Now, you found out about this position in August. You arrived there in September. When were you

able to start assembling this staff of teachers?

MISS JAMES: Well, we started at once. Mr Creel had already employed three teachers, I, one or two others which were very acceptable, and Mr. Creel continued to be in an advisory capacity for the first couple of years, I believe it was, after we opened and we enlarged the school.

DR. CRAWFORD: At the time that you arrived how many teachers did you have and how many did you have to hire after that?

MISS JAMES: There had been three teachers in the school the first year and two more had already been employed by Mr. Creel. Then as we had the need and as more families came in and we had larger groups of children we were able to do this other recruitment.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have to recruit any more in 1934?
Did you have enough when you arrived?

MISS JAMES: Oh no. We had to get more teachers.

DR. CRAWFORD: You had to get them on very short notice?

MISS JAMES: Well, we got them over a period of years, you see. As the school expanded we were able to add teachers.

DR. CRAWFORD: But you had to add some the month you arrived, didn't you?

MISS JAMES: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you get them that quickly?

MISS JAMES: I happen to have had very good contacts with these various educators and explained to them what to do and they were willing to recommend people and to help us interest people who had, we thought, very outstanding capabilities.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, the fact that it was an experimental school. Dr. Reeves, who was the head of Personnel, and Mr. Clapp and Mr. Seay all recognized the sort of thing that we would like to do. They supported us so it was easy to let these prospects know what we hoped to do, so that there would be freedom to work out the program as we went along in terms of our basic philosophy. Now it was experimental to the extent that we did have an opportunity to develop procedures and that sort of thing, but it wasn't entirely an experiment. We had a great deal of experience to base our program on.

DR. CRAWFORD: What sort of teachers did you try to recruit? You had a good deal of experience in supervision. Did you try to get people who were experienced in teaching? Did you try to hire them in a certain age bracket?

MISS JAMES: Well, not exactly. So far as the age bracket is concerned, one of our most outstanding teachers was a rather mature person, Mrs. Ruth Organ. She had certainly been proved to be one of the outstanding teachers in the country. She was just as vigorous as any of the rest of us. So there was no consciousness of trying to find people of a certain age.

DR, CRAWFORD: Did you try to recruit people from a certain state or part of the country?

MISS JAMES: No. We had people from New York. . .

Do you mean the institutions we got them from? Michigan Peabody, and Ohio State and, of course, some local. Alabama has some excellent teachers.

DR. CRAWFORD: It seems to me that you recruited with more variety than the average school did--Certainly in the area.

MISS JAMES: One thing we did try to be conscious of was that we would get a variety of high ability.

Like somebody strong in music and somebody strong in art and that sort of thing, somebody who is strong in crafts, woodworking, shopwork.

DR. CRAWFORD: What sort of enrollments did you have? I know it changed from year to year.

MISS JAMES: At the time that the school closed we had 125 children. For awhile we had through the junior high school, but just as soon as the local agencies or the Sheffield schools could absorb those children we had only the elementary school. At the time the school closed the staff consisted of the principal, Miss Helen Belcher, Miss Charlotte Brown, Mrs. Anita Thorn Delazier, Miss Marietta McCorkle, Miss Gladys Merville, Mrs. Ruth Durham Organ, and Mrs. Bella Quinn Rhodes, who was a local teacher and our substitute teacher and a very fine one. Our secretary was Mrs. Katherine Little Mason. So that

was our staff at the time that the school was closed. Mrs. Belcher was an Alabama girl, Miss Brown was from Illinois, Mrs. Delazier was from New York, Miss McCorkle was from Alabama. She came to us from a West Virginia Teachers College. Miss Gladys Merville was a Tennessee girl, Miss Organ was from Tennessee and, as I said, Mrs. Rhodes was local.

DR. CRAWFORD: You certainly had a varied faculty.

MISS JAMES: And a very wonderful faculty.

DR. CRAWFORD: What sort of student body did you have?
Were they all or generally children of TVA employees?

MISS JAMES: They were all employed by TVA.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you feel that they were an exceptional group of students?

MISS JAMES: I think they were just good average children.
Some very very capable children. All children look mighty important to us.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did they do in their learning? Did you feel that they were well prepared for it.

That they learned well in the school?

MISS JAMES: We hope so. I'll talk about that if you would like for me to.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'd like to know how you checked the quality of education.

MISS JAMES: I think I should speak a little more about the environment of the school, the homeyness

of it. We had a very informal setup. We didn't have desks in rows and that sort of thing. The school rooms themselves lent themselves to informality and homeyness. The teachers worked very hard and the parents helped us and the TVA was very understanding and Mr. John L. Neely, who was manager of properties, of course, had to approve everything that we bought. He probably thought some of the requests we made were strange. In fact, Dr. Reeves told me that he had called him and checked on it what he thought about some of the requests we were making.

DR. CRAWFORD: I've talked with Mr. Neely.

MISS JAMES: Oh have you talked with Mr. Neely? Well, he was a great person, or is a great person, we think. He was very very helpful and his child was one of our pupils.

We were able to get, as I was saying, some from the warehouses where furniture and that sort of thing had been stored from the First World War. We were able to get wicker chairs, and tables, bookcases and things that we could adjust or work over to our needs, with a lot of paint and color. I failed to say that the entire inside of the school building was painted a light color. So that brought plenty of light and air. We didn't have lines marching in. We didn't have desks in rows and that sort of thing. We made many articles of needed equipment. They were made by the children and the teachers. [Such as] easels, bulletin boards, bookcases.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you consider that part of the education?

MISS JAMES: Absolutely. You see that involves all the

process--particularly of arithmetic, measuring then the choosing of colors to paint them. We used Chinese red, yellow and black and green. We had colorful drapes at the windows. The parents of the school and the staff bought plants and pets which the children cared for. That was another learning experience. When we went to this building there were no shrubs or anything around it. It was this great big stucco building. To get a quick effect we planted Holly Hawks and Mexican Sun-flowers and very soon it was an attractive and colorful place.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you check the quality of your education to find how much the students were learning?

MISS JAMES: I'll deal with that a little later if I may.
I'd like to talk about the program if I may first?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes.

MISS JAMES: I want to emphasize the fact that all members of the staff cooperated fully in planning the program of work. As we worked together we developed in strength and depth and breadth as we planned and evaluated and we established our procedures on that basis. We really moved on staff decisions. That meant that we had a unity of philosophy. We maintained open-mindedness, we used all the resources we possibly could to strengthen ourselves to grow as we worked together. We had many visitors. We averaged about a thousand visitors a year. They were a great source of help to us. We always had conferences or something with our visitors after they had visited the school. We had many helpful discussions and suggestions. We even had visitors from foreign

countries who were interested in education. They would come to visit the TVA and they would bring them to see us.

I'd like to say that our staff members possessed knowledge in a number of areas. They were in a state of vigorous physical fitness and a well-rounded personal development. They had information on and willingness to obtain information on findings of scientific research in education. They had the ability to look at problems objectively and the frankness to say, "I don't know, can you help me with this problem?" They possessed a well-adjusted personality which could put aside personal objectives in an acceptance of group objectives. In other words, they had the ability to lose themselves in their work.

The teacher was given broad freedom to develop within the limits of broad basic principles accepted by the group. Initiative and creativeness were encouraged and appreciated and continuous participation of the staff in all aspects of the program by maintaining an intimate knowledge of all the instructional programs of the other teachers. There was a great deal of sharing. They worked together in study groups and discussed and evaluated and chose instructional materials and supplies to be purchased. They selected books for the library and assisted in selection of new staff members. We felt that new staff members made a unique contribution with their freshness of outlook as they came to us. We didn't try to put them in a lock-step, but we accepted them as they were and appreciated them.

Now there were certain big principles that we accepted. Directions or growths: we considered these very important. Respect for the individual permeated the educational approach. In other words we tried and, I believe

we did, employ democratic procedures. This emphasized the value and integrity of staff members and children. This did not prevent the establishment of needed authority by the principal in matters of administration or the teachers in management of pupil management. Conversely, it demanded it, but this administration of authority had to be fair and was, therefore accepted willingly and the recipient received security from it. The children participated fully in developing subjects of study and in establishing rules and regulations governing their conduct. This in turn developed inner control with them. The reasons for requirement were always understood.

Secondly, we considered cooperation very important rather than competition. We didn't give marks or grades comparing one child with another. Evaluation considered the total growth and rate of the child. Children and all persons involved in the school, children and teachers, participated at the planning level of all concerned. We recognized that establishment of routine in living provides freedom for richer experiences. Some of these constants were lunch, rest, use of the toilet facilities, care of materials, and other common activities. Agreed on the best procedure for each was accepted by the total school. The child did not have to relearn living procedures as he moved from one group to another. The routine had already been established. This contributed to smoothness of program, security and economy of time. We had no bells to move by, and as I mentioned before, no rigid seating, no marching lines. we tried to help the children face success and failure frankly, but we also protected them from failure which they did not understand.

We considered also that freedom comes from corresponding responsibility. Controlled freedom directing them from within is really freedom, otherwise freedom becomes license. We gave attention to rhythm and balance in the school program as we guided instruction. Sensitivity on the part of the teacher to timing in terms of interest and emotional tone and recognition of the need for balance between activity and quiet resulted in a child's day which moved smoothly from one phase to the next. This freed them to a great extent from the abruptness of their rigid periods, but was marked by great depth and breadth of learning.

Our aim of course, was growth in desirable directions. The major objectives of the school which were set up by the staff finally fell into four broad areas: Healthful living, intellectual competence, emotional poise and social responsibility. These objectives found expression in the following areas of activity: In healthful living, knowledge and practice of proper health habits and attitudes, intellectual competence--capacity to solve problems met in daily living, emotional poise--in stability to meet situations as they develop, social responsibility--willingness to assume responsibility inherent in group life. That's a good place to stop.





THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY.
THE PROJECT IS "AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY."
THE PLACE IS NORTHPORT, ALABAMA. THE DATE IS MARCH 9, 1973. THE
INTERVIEW IS WITH MISS VIRGINIA WHITE JAMES. THE INTERVIEW IS BY
DR. CHARLES CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE ORAL HISTORY
RESEARCH OFFICE. TRANSCRIBED BY BETTY WILLIAMS. INTERVIEW # 2.

DR. CRAWFORD: Miss James, let's go ahead from the part
where we stopped in the first interview.

MISS JAMES: All right. We were talking about objectives
for our work at the Wilson Dam School. We
recognized that interest is a powerful motivation. A child's interest
in a garden, for instance, may result in an intensive reading of cata-
logs, garden books, and planting instruction books, whereas in a reading
class he might not find it so interesting. Guidance is an essential re-
sponsibility of the school. Guidance places great demand on understanding
and skill of the teacher in dealing with both the child's interests and
need of adult life which have to be in balance. [There was] just re-
sponsibility on the part of the teacher in checking against the Alabama
course of study and standard test which we will discuss later.

Intimate knowledge of the children and their environment must be
obtained by the teachers by conferences with parents, visits to home,

and talks with the children. We were fortunate at the Wilson Dam School in having a two weeks' planning period before opening of the school and a two weeks' planning period for closing the school when the children were not present. So in this way we were able to give our undivided attention to our teaching responsibilities. This also gave us time for friendly visits at home. We realized how very important it is to have a close working relation between the home and the school and understanding each of the other of their objectives and purposes.

We also recognized that growth was an individual matter. Individual differences were considered basic. Differences in extent of growth among children of the same age group may be greater than the difference between two different age groups. Continuity of growth is also important to be considered. New experiences must be built on past understanding to have meaning.

Drill is approached after meaning. Learning can be perfected through practice or drill until the process is automatic such as in the learning of multiplication tables. It isn't just a matter of rote learning, but it's learning based on understanding of process of the reason or the meaning of multiplication.

Another important phase of learning is the mutual exchange of experience--sharing in such areas as art, music, reading both among children and staff. We were not able to employ special teachers for these various areas of interest, however, we tried to find teachers who had a variety of special skills which they shared generously throughout the school. Sharing

was carried out throughout all activities of the room and in the library. It was a common way of living together--children sharing, older children sharing with younger children, one teacher sharing with another, whole groups of children sharing with other groups.

Each morning we had a group time at which interesting experiences were shared. Maybe on Monday morning children reported of a trip they had taken with their parents over the week end. Maybe they would display or talk about such interesting things that they had found--like arrowheads or unusual plants. Another form of sharing was that the teachers exchanged groups at times. This gave children an opportunity to know more intimately the various teachers.

The library was a very important part of our school. The children loved the library. It became part of them. They made daily visits for records, for reference, for browsing, to get special books, and the school had looked everywhere. There were rural libraries, books on the home, books placed near interest centers such as an aquarium, science tables, a display of rocks, and so forth.

Health instruction was considered very basic to our program. In fact, it had priority. Attention was given to a good balance of exercise, sleep, well balanced diet, sunshine, air, cleanliness, and correction of physical defects. Gains in height and weight were watched by the teachers and recorded. A record of illnesses was kept. Wholesome health habits were established through practice. School and home worked together on these things. The PTA mothers supervised preparation of hot lunches for

the school. Being a government operated school we didn't share in the regular school lunch program. Rest immediately followed the lunch. Sometimes on a lovely day, a warm sunny day, this rest was out of doors. The county health officer and the TVA dentist gave careful physical examinations to all the children at the beginning of school. The Schick test and immunizations were given when needed. Correction of remedial defects was urged before entering school. Children entering the kindergarten were examined. Kindergarten teacher worked closely with the parents.

Resource people came to tell of the danger of typhoid and malaria following the flood which was nearby. It resulted in our getting screens for the school.

The natural and community environment provided primary points of interest in the school program. I think I mentioned before that the school was ideally located. [It had] a wide open space in front, and a natural environment of great interest. Behind the school a dry stream bed separated the school from a tree-covered hill and beyond the hill was the Tennessee River. Many discoveries were made on walks about the school and were brought back for closer observation and research. Tiny plants and ferns and mosses filled the terrarium. Such animal life as toads, bats, a small harmless snake were studied to mention a few.

Science tables displayed old bird's nests of various kinds and leaves, seeds, cones, cocoons, curious insects, shells and rocks and so forth. The two latter--shells and rocks--were identified and classified. They were very interesting to see how the children gained in this skill and

how they learned to use the library for reference in running down their findings about their objects of interest.

The garden and a forestry project already have been mentioned briefly. Children visited TVA activities--the fertilizer plant, the dam--Wilson Dam--and studied navigation, the power plant, flood control, and all of these were explained and discussed by TVA Specialists. They were a great resource for us.

Three towns were nearby, Shieffield, Tuscumbia, and Florence. These provided community resources. For instance, the Post Office, the bank, the broadcasting stations, railroad shops, dairy, water works, colonial homes, for visitation and study. More distant excursions to capitals--at Montgomery--and of Nashville were made. All these experiences followed up by studies, discussions and reading lessons and so forth.

Elementary pupils conducted original investigations and experimentation on problems and topics that particularly interested them. Of course, the teachers helped to guide children in these investigations in order to lift the work into more and more profitable paths. In 1940 most of the sixth grade had spent their entire school life in the school, and from year to year had gained experience in planning, carrying out those plans, and so developed skills and strengths to organize,

For example, I would like to mention a group of twenty which agreed on the organization of separate subjects for study. Separate subjects were listed and grouped and into four divisions--mainly science, social studies, reading, and arithmetic. Each child chose a division of his

greatest interest. The groups explored possibilities in the library and some other local resources and also current events. The reports were prepared and presented to the entire group and the entire group decided on plans to be followed in each area. Then the total group pursued studying of each group. This was an important part of the year's study. In the science areas they concentrated on the human body as being most basic, after considering stars, oceans, inventions and machinery.

In connection with this study they visited a one teacher school in a remote part of the county and spent the day observing and sharing of the work. As a result of this they were able to contrast their resources with the children there. They noticed Ada, a ten year old girl in the third grade who had great vision difficulty. The children consulted with the county health officer who recommended a good oculist in Sheffield. Then the children decided to work and make money enough to buy Ada glasses. Her parents brought her to town the first time she had been to Sheffield. Before she had her glasses she could read only from the very top line on the chart. The children got great satisfaction from having helped Ada as they had.

Again from the garden experience each group had a plot. They measured the plots and measured spaces between the rows and measured the space between the vegetables and the depth to plant each vegetable. They also planted flowers after caring for their vegetables they had them for lunch. So they had the entire cycle then of planting, of caring for, nurturing, and then the reward of eating the vegetables. They also shared their

flowers. They carried some of them home. They kept them in the room and took care of them and how to arrange flowers and how to make plastic flower arrangements. They got a great deal of pleasure from their flowers.

Another learning that came from the vegetables was that they learned to prepare them or get them ready for cooking. That meant very careful attention to cleanliness and they also had an opportunity to learn something of taking care of pets in connection with their garden. In other words it was a very very rich experience in which every child in the school shared. You can see how in measuring, a great deal of arithmetic was involved, and reporting and discussing of course, much language experience.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was there any other sort of school in Alabama where that sort of thing was being done?

MISS JAMES: Oh I'm sure there were. In fact I know in Talladega County where I had been supervisor of schools I know that we were having some very fine work done.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know of any other institutions though that did all of those things?

MISS JAMES: I don't think I could be specific and be sure about it, but I'm sure that it is true that there were many. We just had a very unusual opportunity and freedom and don't think that we didn't carry the responsibility that went with the freedom too. We were very sincere, we tried to be very scientific. We continued to learn how to do a better and better job all the time. The

same things that I have pointed out there as being basic in guiding the learning of children are basic in the learning of teachers--we worked together in the way we developed. I think the principal learned more than anybody else--organization.

DR. CRAWFORD: Wasn't that unusual at the time to give that attention to learning on the part of your faculty and staff?

MISS JAMES: I don't know. They were highly motivated. I haven't mentioned that after the first two years the principal carried a double responsibility of being Principal of Wilson Dam School and also of being general supervisor of all TVA schools, which had been built. So you can see that the school really was carried by the entire staff. It didn't suffer because of that by any means.

DR. CRAWFORD: And your enrollment and your faculty increased each year?

MISS JAMES: Yes. Of course after we released the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades we had only the elementary and kindergarten through sixth grades.

DR. CRAWFORD: Why did TVA set this school up? Could not the entire small number of students been absorbed in the school system?

MISS JAMES: They just weren't able to. At the end of seven years they were able to absorb all of them. Our senior high school they could take from the very beginning.

But they were not able to take through the junior high school right away.

But later they did then for the seven years we continued to operate.

DR. CRAWFORD: Closing in 1941?

MISS JAMES: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Could TVA not have given the funds to the County system to increase their capacity?

MISS JAMES: They did that to the extent that they could, but this was such a sudden influx of students.

You see all the developmental work happened with TVA at the Shoals.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember about what your enrollment was the first year?

MISS JAMES: I'm sorry I'd be afraid to say.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you suppose it would be near 100 or 200?

MISS JAMES: We were never over 200, I don't think. I couldn't say for sure.

DR. CRAWFORD: Perhaps around 100 or 150?

MISS JAMES: Probably so. But in the final there were 125 children in the school. You see we didn't have such large groups was another thing that made it possible to do a lot of these things. It was a fortunate opportunity for us as teachers. It provided not only a fun learning situation for the children but also for the staff.

DR. CRAWFORD: You had a very good faculty-student ratio, didn't you?

MISS JAMES: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what size the average class might have been?

MISS JAMES: Oh I think about 20 to 25. Maybe a little bit more, it varied a little bit maybe from 18 or 19 to 20 and to 30. Something like that. I don't remember exactly.

DR. CRAWFORD: It seems to have been very good for that time.

MISS JAMES: Yes very unusual. And unusual for today when things are as crowded as they are.

DR. CRAWFORD: TVA also used that as an opportunity to improve education of the area, didn't it? Wasn't this not just a matter of educating TVA employees, but in truth. . .

MISS JAMES: It proved to be that, but it wasn't the intent when the school was established. The intent of the school was purely to provide a school for the children of employees of the Muscle Shoals area. But it did prove to be that because it had so many visitors and people were interested. We had people from various institutions. When our film was made before the close of the school in 1940, I believe it was, it was used a great deal. For instance the principal showed it at the University of Chicago, Ohio State University, District of Columbia, all throughout the Valley states and we had visitors from the U.S. Office of Education and a representative of the U.S. Office of Education showed it at a general session of the NEA in Denver that year. So it was quite well known.

DR. CRAWFORD: To have been started just as a school to

educate some of the children of TVA employees it obviously proved more successful than was required just for that? I can't imagine that foreign visitors here for example to see TVA would see an ordinary school.

MISS JAMES: We had many groups of visitors that came back from year to year. I remember one school group in Tennessee came back from year to year. The young man who was supervisor of the County schools there was later a professor of education at University of Louisville in Kentucky. Visitors like that were very stimulating asset to us. We benefitted from our visitors. Professors of education from various universities came.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you manage to get assets from them?
Did you have conferences with them?

MISS JAMES: Always because of their visit we had conferences with them.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you find time to do that?

MISS JAMES: I don't know. Sometime, if it is important enough you can do it. But we did and it was managed and we were lucky.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you do any teaching yourself?

MISS JAMES: No, I didn't. I was in the classrooms a great deal. Other responsibilities kept me pretty busy.

DR. CRAWFORD: This idea of exchanging teachers in classrooms

sometimes?

MISS JAMES: Just for a special purpose.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that widely done at the time so far as you know?

MISS JAMES: I don't know of it being done. I just gave that as an example of sharing.

DR. CRAWFORD: It seems that several new ideas were put into effect in this school.

MISS JAMES: Well, I don't know how startlingly new that was, maybe we have been doing it for years and years all over, but we just happened to do it. It seemed that it just came about naturally. We just felt a need for it. A teacher knew that something was going on in another room and she or maybe they had discussed what they were doing and it was a good thing for the children to come closer socially in contact with more personalities.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you had more opportunity than usual in that school?

MISS JAMES: Oh my yes. That was the thing that challenged us so that we realized that we were going to have this fine opportunity.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever have any doubts about taking the job when it was offered to you?

MISS JAMES: Not after my conference with Mr. Clapp.

DR. CRAWFORD: What sort of loyalty and enthusiasm did you get from your teachers?



MISS JAMES: Well, we were like a family. We all supported one another.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they tend to stay once they were there?

MISS JAMES: Yes. We lost Miss T.J. She went to a supervisor's position in Georgia. She was one of our outstanding teachers. She came to us from Kalamazoo, Michigan, but she was a student of Lucy Gage. Miss Gage was at Peabody. She didn't have a doctor's degree, but she was one of the great educators in the South. She made a wonderful contribution for education. She had great vision. In fact, you see she worked with demonstration schools at Peabody and Mrs. Organ and Miss T.J. both had been teachers in the demonstration school there. Then Miss T.J. went to the College at Kalamazoo before she came to us. Miss Gage helped us select outstanding teachers. She was one of the people who made a really fine contribution to our school. And she visited us quite often.

DR. CRAWFORD: You didn't have much turnover among teachers, did you?

MISS JAMES: No, we didn't.

DR. CRAWFORD: How were your salary levels? Did you try to adjust them to the Alabama average?

MISS JAMES: They were a little bit better. Another thing they had--we were on the TVA payroll--and they had a month with pay in the summer. As I told you that before we had this very valuable two weeks before the opening of the school and two weeks

before the opening of school we had various opportunities to do visiting and planning and set up the rooms and all that sort of thing which is so essential.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have much contact with the parents of these children?

MISS JAMES: Oh yes. I told you that they came into the school and supervised the preparation of our lunches, and we had excellent lunches.

DR. CRAWFORD: You did not miss the lack of state financing for that?

MISS JAMES: We managed without it. Our children were well taken care of at school and at home.

DR. CRAWFORD: What about measuring their progress?

MISS JAMES: I was just going to talk about that. We were concerned with constant evaluation. In terms of our objectives, methods and results, the staff and children learned to face the truth. What it means to be responsible and cooperation with others. We considered personal behavior as a test of social and emotional growth. Children assumed responsibility when the teacher was not in the room. I know one instance one teacher was going to be away for the whole afternoon. She asked if she might plan with her children and leave them in charge and this was first grade. It happened that we had a visitor from the State Department in Tennessee that day and he was so fascinated about it that he sat there and watched those children go through their afternoon program with all kinds of responsibility. The teacher was not there. But he (the visitor)

didn't leave the room--he said he couldn't leave the room. He just had to stay and watch it--he couldn't believe it.

The children were given many opportunities to check whether or not they were becoming confident in their skills of taking care of themselves. We tried to help the children work to the full extent of their abilities. Achievement tests were given regularly over the five year period so the staff could check by that score standard how our children were rating with other schools. We found that they were measuring up all right in terms of their individual abilities.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what kind of tests you used?

MISS JAMES: We used the Sanford. We used the Ace-Malone Intelligence Tests and we used some group intelligence tests.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you conclude as a result of these that the students were as far along in their level as you could expect?

MISS JAMES: Yes and that was confirmed when they went into the local schools?

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you follow up after they entered the local schools?

MISS JAMES: Not to the extent that we would have wished to, but you see we were scattered. Our staff went to other teacher education institutions. The University of Kentucky got several of them. The teachers college at Jacksonville, Alabama got Miss

McCorkle and Sitmore College got Mrs. DeLazier and Miss Brown taught at the famous private school in Philadelphia, you know the one that was just set up for boys.

DR. CRAWFORD: I know the one--Gerrard?

MISS JAMES: Gerrard, uh huh. That's right, she taught there and now she is principal of the elementary department of one of the large private schools in Philadelphia. In fact they have just requested that Wilson Dam School Film and have used it in their studies for the teachers group study. So we were scattered and of course, I was very much involved in my work at the Central Office of TVA. We had reports on it from teachers and parents and enough that we felt comfortable about it.

DR. CRAWFORD: You tried to fit your students in preparation for moving into the state high school.

MISS JAMES: We felt that good well-rounded preparation and meaningful learning in the skill subjects would prepare them and I think it did.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you continue to have contact with the students after they left in any other ways?

MISS JAMES: We had follow-ups on them--yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did the parents seem pleased with their ability when they transferred.

MISS JAMES: Well, so far as we know they did. I still hear from some of the parents and a few of the children too. In fact some of the children who were in the elemen-

tary school at Wilson Dam have come to the University of Alabama for further studies.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know how they did at University of Alabama?

MISS JAMES: No, I haven't followed that up. I know they graduated. I don't know if they were summa cum laude or not (Laughter), but they graduated.

DR. CRAWFORD: You seem you have had a well rounded program. Were there any parts that you emphasized specifically--reading, math or any other part?

MISS JAMES: Well, all the way through, yes. We were very conscious of that and don't get the idea that we left out drills, the perfecting of these skills. The big point I tried to make in our discussion was that we approached them through meaning. For instance we didn't just have children memorize the multiplication tables. They knew what the process really was.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that one of your ideas?

MISS JAMES: Not personal with me. It certainly was my idea, but not original. That's been basic since John Dewey and before.

DR. CRAWFORD: How about your staff meetings--were they informative? Did you get many useful ideas from the teachers?

MISS JAMES: My yes indeed. And there was a high level of

sharing. We learned together. We had a problem--we approached it as a group. Each person gave his very best in solutions. I think I have tried to make the point that our school moved on staff decision.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that sort of an innovation or was that rather new or used in schools in the area?

MISS JAMES: I wouldn't be able to say. I know that existed to a certain extent in the county in which I was working before I came to TVA in Alabama, but I wouldn't be able to say about that. I am sure it must be true at a good school.

DR. CRAWFORD: Perhaps I was wondering how many were very good schools then? I had guessed that the structure would be more authoritarian.

MISS JAMES: I am afraid it is in a great many places. In a great many situations teachers need more guidance. I think I'll ultimate the point--I'm sure the principal learned from the teachers. It wasn't a matter of handing down information or handing down directions. Not that sort of thing at all. Every person's contribution was respected.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you had a select faculty--picked out carefully. Did these staff meetings take place generally after school hours?

MISS JAMES: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were the teachers willing to give this sort of time of their own?

MISS JAMES: I must say they seemed eager to get in there and thrash things out. It didn't matter whether the principal was there or not they had individual study groups on certain things that they were going deeper and deeper into. Maybe two or three would be working on a special project. As far as motivation was concerned it was within the teachers.

DR. CRAWFORD: You seem to have had a very interesting group of teachers there that you had selected.

MISS JAMES: Oh there is no question about it. They were quite a remarkable group. They made a fine contribution.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you have any troubles with supplies or instructional material?

MISS JAMES: Well, we ordered those through Mr. Neely. He was usually very generous with us. We were especially interested in getting materials that the children could do creative things like building blocks, clay, paints. We really had some wonderful artists among our children. Of course, any child who really expresses his feelings is able to do that through painting or any medium is a very creative child. We encouraged that throughout. We felt that that contributed to a good wholesome rich life--that ability to be able to express oneself through various mediums.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you able to find these things to order that you wanted?

MISS JAMES: Oh yes, we knew the resources. We knew where they could be ordered. We had had experience with all these materials.

DR. CRAWFORD: What about books--was your library supplied in the same way?

MISS JAMES: Oh yes, and our teachers choose the books. Our librarian was really our secretary.

The secretary of the school was really the librarian. This is interesting too. To show you how she grew, she became interested in library work and we encouraged her to go to Emory University and take the program in library education there and she became one of the outstanding librarians in the state library in Georgia. In fact, she made some original contributions.

DR. CRAWFORD: I would think you had a very inspiring school there.

MISS JAMES: Well, I think the thing about it was, that we felt free to let our thoughts be known and we were given the freedom to try them out. Not that everything succeeded! But the very fact that we tried them out I think indicates some degree of success.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you were successful in having freedom to experiment with things.

MISS JAMES: We were constantly aware of the fact that there was no freedom without responsibility

that goes with it.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did your visitors react? Did any of them seem critical of what they saw? Were any of them disturbed?

MISS JAMES: We did have. We asked them to be very frank and if they saw something they didn't understand or didn't quite understand we wanted them to be free to say so. Sometimes there would be some very searching questions. But we were glad to have them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Among your visitors what sort of people did you have?

MISS JAMES: Well, we had groups of educators. For instance, from the countries, county supervisors would come and bring--oh, fifteen or twenty teachers with them for visiting day. We had groups of teachers from Memphis State University. We had several of the staff of the demonstration school over there plus some of the professors of education--that is a typical group. Then we had a great many visitors from Tennessee--public schools of Tennessee and Alabama.

DR. CRAWFORD: Evidently the school that you developed there was very well known.

MISS JAMES: It came to be well-known. And it was by word of mouth and not by advertising.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were articles written about it in professional

journals?

MISS JAMES: Well, some later. We were too busy doing to write. We were written about by others.

DR. CRAWFORD: That I suppose attracted some of the visitors.

MISS JAMES: Yes, and you see, people who came would tell what they saw and that would interest other people in coming.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now I know the Tennessee Valley Authority itself had many visitors during this time.

Did they bring some of them to your school?

MISS JAMES: I remember this one group of educators from several different foreign countries who came.

They brought them to see the Wilson Dam School. I think some of them wondered at the informality of this school. You know most European schools are rather formal. So I remember some of the questions that the gentlemen asked. We had a fine conference with them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Have you studied any particular kind of European school before you did this work?

MISS JAMES: No, only as you would get it in the usual graduate study.

DR. CRAWFORD: TVA evidently regarded your school as a show place after awhile that they brought visitors to see.

MISS JAMES: Well, I hope they didn't feel about that way. They were interested in coming to see us. I remember one extremely interesting lady that we had. She had been in the Department of Education in Chile. She was later Chile's representative to the United Nations and was on the Human Relations Committee with Mrs. Roosevelt. But she was a very interesting visitor and she stayed several days. We enjoyed her very much. Then she later visited us at the TVA offices and sat in on some of our conferences there. She seemed to be deeply interested in what we were doing. That's just an example.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I am assuming that any agency would not send visitors to one of its actions of which they had any reason to be ashamed. They must have been quite proud of your work.

MISS JAMES: Well, I hope they weren't ashamed of us.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you get many visitors on a fairly regular basis from TVA itself?

MISS JAMES: Yes, the specialist visited us. I mentioned Dr. Key and then the specialist from Health Education and the Library. There was a local library and TVA library at Wilsom Dam headquarters. And those people became good resource people for us. We used our resources with people and things.

DR. CRAWFORD: Evidently you did. Did all these visitors ever get in the way of teaching?



MISS JAMES: No. They didn't bother us.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who usually guided them around the school?

MISS JAMES: Well, they were given the freedom of the school. They were briefed and then they knew where the office was and knew the layout of the school and they were free to go. We had so many visitors that we went right on with our work. We paid no attention to them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they go into the classrooms?

MISS JAMES: Oh yes, they went into the classrooms and often they were involved and became resource people in the classrooms which was a valuable asset.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think it would be.

MISS JAMES: Very valuable.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was not the usual was it at the time-- that sort of practice?

MISS JAMES: You check me on things like that--I really don't know, Dr. Crawford. I just know we were trying to make the most of every day as we lived and worked together.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you are very modest about this, but you seem to have had an unusual degree of success doing all the things that contribute to the student's learning.

MISS JAMES: Well, I don't claim any personal credit for that. We had seven extremely resource-

ful teachers. Very creative and very scientific in their approach, very knowledgeable, and very skilled and I must say very generous personalities.

DR. CRAWFORD: What sort of management from TVA visited the school?

MISS JAMES: Well, we had them all the way from the top down, I would say.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did any members of the Board of Directors give you special support?

MISS JAMES: Well, Mr. Lilienthal never did come to see us. Dr. Harcourt Morgan didn't. I am sure they were all behind us. They were interested in what we were doing.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did Dr. Arthur Morgan get there to visit you?

MISS JAMES: No. He never did.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Seay was there. Did Floyd Reeves ever get there?

MISS JAMES: Yes, Dr. Reeves did.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did he think of your school?

MISS JAMES: Well, he thought we were doing well. He was interested, and I think he approved. He didn't say he disapproved.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did the parents think their children were receiving good preparation?

MISS JAMES: I think they did. Maybe some were a little



skeptical at first, but they were all pretty much involved. They were a great asset to us.

DR. CRAWFORD: I would think that many of them would have been in the background.

MISS JAMES: And many of them were fine resources. You see there are so many specialist down there.

And they were very generous in coming to us and meeting with our children when we needed to have help on some special project. I think I told you about the malaria and you see there was a very serious Mississippi flood and it flooded some of the areas of the Tennessee Valley. That brought things pretty close to home. That is just one example. The forestry came and helped us. I didn't tell you about that, did I?

DR. CRAWFORD: No, will you please.

MISS JAMES: I don't know whether I gave the gardening enough of importance or not, but there was an eroded place on the playground--a badly eroded place. The school wanted to do something about it so a committee went to the Forestry Department and talked with the foresters and also found out that they would give us pine seedlings to plant on this eroded place. Not only that but one of the forestry specialist who came and directed the children in planting the trees. The children talked about how in twenty years from now they were going to come back and see their forest. So that was fine learning experience and it was also related to a problem of the area. They learned so many things from their gardening. We

talked about that some. It was a very integral part of the total learning experience.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you take the children out of the school on trips?

MISS JAMES: Oh yes, I thought I mentioned that. We went to and visited the different activities of the community--Post Office and bank.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you get transportation for that?

MISS JAMES: Parents usually helped us with their cars and teachers used theirs. We didn't have a bus. You see there were three villages--Village 1, 2, and 3. The school was in Village 1 and a great many of the children lived in Village 2 which was near the Fertilizer Operation and that's where the TVA offices were centered too and then Village 3 was near the dam. So the children were brought to school. They had some bus experience.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was your school--I'm sure it was. Who accredited the school?

MISS JAMES: Well, we were under the guidance, of and we were advised by the State Department of Education, and we had visitors from the State Department all the time. (Alabama) I mentioned Mr. Creel, the local superintendent of Sheffield schools, who helped us in an advisory capacity.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you meet nine months of the year?

MISS JAMES: We had ten months of the year.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that standard for Alabama at the time?

MISS JAMES: No, it was a little longer than usual.

We had ten months of school and then a month was given to the teachers (two weeks before school opened and two weeks after) and then we had a month's vacation with pay.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you encourage any type of activity on the part of your teachers? Did they have a chance to study other courses or direct certain projects or travel?

MISS JAMES: Well, I am sure that they did but not during the year, maybe on week ends we did. I know one week end we went to Gatlinburg all together. Of course we attended the Alabama Education Association meetings. We were members of the Alabama Education Association and we also attended national meetings of the Association for Curriculum Development and the Association for Childhood Development. Those were the main ones. Our people were members of those organizations and very important members.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think that other schools would have been very interested in what you were doing.

Were you on programs often at other places?

MISS JAMES: Yes, we were.

DR. CRAWFORD: I wonder if part of TVA's idea in your school was not just to teach the children of employees, but to develop and demonstrate ideas of education? Did you feel that was part of it?

MISS JAMES: Well, I feel that they would like in every possible way that they could to make a contribution. I guess Wilson Dam and Norris were only ones where TVA established just TVA schools. In all of the other situations they were able to cooperate and they wanted to the extent that they could cooperate with the local agencies and help them to take care of the schools. That happened for instance at Guntersville Dam. We helped them to establish the Hebron School which took care of our children--the TVA children. But it was a regular county school. The same happened at Gilbertsville in Marshall County--cooperation in Marshall County. We helped Marshall County to establish the school there--it is still a county school. We contributed to it and supervisory assistance was given to it. For instance that was my responsibility--as Supervisor of Elementary Schools for TVA.

DR. CRAWFORD: How much time did your supervisory work take away from the Wilson Dam School while you were there?

MISS JAMES: It would be impossible for me to evaluate that. We just tried to do both jobs.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was the reason behind the closing of the Wilson Dam School?

MISS JAMES: It was no longer needed. There had been building expansion and the local schools were able to take care of the children so it wasn't necessary to keep

it any longer. It was a wrench to give it up, but we did.

DR. CRAWFORD: During the time that it existed it must have had an impact on education in the area considering the thousand visitors or so that you had for years.

MISS JAMES: I hope it did and I hope if there was an impact that it was for the better.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, these people who visited your school must have put into practice some of the things they learned there in their own, in their teaching.

MISS JAMES: I think they did. At least they probably felt that it was contributing to their growth or they wouldn't have continued to come.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I know there is no way to measure the influence, but it seems to me it must have had a good deal of influence on the region --Alabama and Tennessee for example.

MISS JAMES: I hope so. I don't know that I could give any specific evidences of it though, but I'm sure there are some.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, if you are in existence 7 years and you had a thousand visitors per year, surely 7,000 educators per year roughly.

MISS JAMES: They weren't all from Alabama and Tennessee. Many were from Georgia and Mississippi.



DR. CRAWFORD: They must have taken back ideas back with them. Some of which were surely put into use in other schools.

MISS JAMES: You see Alabama has had a good supervision of instruction program over a long period of years. I don't know whether you realize it or not, but Alabama has really had some excellent programs. I remember even back to the days of Dr. Robert E. Tidwell. He encouraged the establishment, I don't know if it was original with him or not, but I know he contributed a great deal to it with the establishment of supervision of elementary schools that gave the teachers and the principal of each county school another resource of help. So a great many of our visitors were supervisors from the various counties bringing groups of their teachers.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, one purpose was accomplished by teaching the children of TVA Personnel on the Wilson location and another purpose presumably by demonstrating ideas in education.

MISS JAMES: You see this happened to be during a period of great deal of interest in curriculum development. This was the time of Caswell and Campbell at Peabody. They were able to see us attempting to put into operation a great many things that were being talked about a great deal in educational circles. So from that standpoint it was helpful. Because not all teachers are free to do everything that they feel like they would like to do. They

might be able to do it to a certain extent within the limits of their own capacity or their own classrooms or a principal in terms of his school, but feel that there would be rules and regulations which would prevent the expansion maybe of those activities.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, your own faculty was very free to do things. As principal did you generally feel that the ones they tried worked well?

MISS JAMES: Yes, because I don't think they jumped into them blindly. I think they moved into things after a great deal of thought, careful evaluation, sharing discussing and then we moved on a mature decision--nothing haphazard about it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you feel that that sort of freedom would work generally in a school?

MISS JAMES: I think it would depend upon the attitude of the principal and the teachers. I think if it were present with the principal that it could more easily permeate the interest of the teachers. Did I make my point clear?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, and certainly in the Wilson Dam School the principal agreed with those things.

MISS JAMES: Oh yes. I had great respect for the thinking and contribution of the teachers and the staff. There were a lot of things they knew more about and they were specialties than the principal did. The principal was not hesitant in

saying so.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you feel then that the school accomplished its purposes by the time that it moved along and probably more intrinsically as time passed.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who participated in the decision that it was time to close the school?

MISS JAMES: TVA, the authorities of TVA. But they also were not willing for it to be closed without having some permanent record on it. So they had the film made and had the book written and the teachers contributed to that and Mr. McLaughlin edited it. It was printed by the University of Kentucky Bureau of School Services.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'd like to get the data of that for the interview and some things about your transition into Knoxville.



THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY.
THIS PROJECT IS "AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY."
THE PLACE IS NORTHPORT, ALABAMA. THE DATE IS MARCH 9, 1973. THE
INTERVIEW IS WITH MISS VIRGINIA WHITE JAMES. THE INTERVIEW IS BY
DR. CHARLES CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE ORAL HISTORY RE-
SEARCH OFFICE. TRANSCRIBED BY BETTY WILLIAMS. INTERVIEW #3.

DR. CRAWFORD: Miss James, we are ready to start again.

MISS JAMES: I believe we were still talking about
evaluation. Reports to parents were a
very important part of that. Now we started out in the beginning with
the Sheffield report card which was the traditional report card to be
marked "A", "B" and "C" and so forth. We felt that this was too limited
so we began to work on reporting to parents and filing that. We wrote
letters. Well, we found that that did not give the parents enough se-
curity. You see they had been accustomed to more specific evaluations--
definite A, B, C or number and so on. So we worked gradually then from
that stage through several stages until finally, (I'll not go into all
those stages) I believe it was next to the last year, we decided that we
should have a printed report in which would be included more of the
philosophy of the purposes of the school. And we would provide a space

for the parents to report to us as well as for us to report to parents. Before we developed a more inclusive report card--which I'll not go into too much.

After a great deal of consideration and thought, it was agreed that these following points which I am going to mention might help the parents to see more clearly and understand the objectives of the school more. First, the philosophy of the school and activities of the child should be interpreted more specifically so as to bring about a better understanding between the home and the school. Secondly, although the report that we were using recognized the child as a whole, we felt that more interest should be placed on health. This was felt to be a basic factor in the happiness and success of each child.

Thirdly, the parents should be helped to see the value of self-expression in children and to encourage and stimulate an appreciation for beauty. I might say that many parents (for one instance in art) prepared easels and a workroom for a place for the children, and they carried on that activity. That was only one activity that they carried on. Many of the parents became very much interested in helping the children in making collections of science material and they took excursions with them, which was just wonderful. The parents would be helped to see the value of self-expression in children and to encourage and to stimulate appreciation for beauty. I wanted to say that again because I think that last point is so important. It helps children appreciate the beauty in their surroundings.

We felt that the parents should be helped to see the great need for using social courtesies such as "thank you", "please", and "good morning" and so forth so that the child could develop poise and security in the social group. Lastly, we felt the parents should be helped to see how knowledge of the tool subjects can best be gained as a child is brought to feel a need for them in his daily living. That was one thing that we had certainly tried to emphasize all the way along. We did not neglect the skills, but we tried to approach them through meaning so that they would be more functional.

We finally decided that the reports should be divided into three large areas--physical care and guidance, encouraging intellectual development, and fostering social and emotional growth. As I mentioned before, space was provided for the parents to report to us as well as for us to report to them. They were very, very cooperative. I think that this report that set forth in a great deal of detail the principles that I have mentioned here, I think that report was a vehicle for assimilating growth not only on the part of the school but on the part of the parents.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you divide that report?

MISS JAMES: Well, again it was a group project.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did it require a great deal of work on the part of your teachers?

MISS JAMES: Yes, anything like that requires work.



MISS JAMES: No, they felt that it was a need--something needed--and they wanted to work out a report that would be of greater value. They were highly motivated. I could outline what was presented in the report, for instance, on the child which was (1) Physical care and guidance. We reported on scientific research and told how he put physical health first and we emphasized the need for physical examinations which usually detect diseases before danger stage. We emphasized the fact that the child needs proper food and in many of our conferences with parents this had been emphasized and many of our parents were very knowledgeable in this field and they helped us. We also emphasized the fact that they needed sufficient rest and sleep to allow his body to recover from the fatigue of the day's activities. There was the need for acquiring knowledge of what personal care is and to develop the practice of living with accordance with this knowledge. It doesn't help to gain a lot of knowledge unless you are going to let it function in our lives. That was a basic principle of our little school. Then there was dispersion of a health examination and the importance of the health examination. Then, as I said, a space was provided for a report from home and a report from the school.

DR. CRAWFORD: How much was involved in this? Was this on a report card form or a single folder?

MISS JAMES: Well, I have a copy here, the first part that you can glance at. That is only the first part dealing with physical aspects. And it looks to be a document and

is really quite a document. Of course, TVA helped us to get it out.

DR. CRAWFORD: Again, did you know of this being done in any other school anywhere at the time?

MISS JAMES: I never have found any just exactly like this. This was a product of the Wilson Dam School. We didn't have very long to use it, but we did use it enough to test it out. Of course, another year there might have been revisions in this. Because we had grown from the A, B, C's type of report card through all these various stages until we reached this last stage.

DR. CRAWFORD: You were still developing the school up until the time you closed it?

MISS JAMES: Up until the last minute.

DR. CRAWFORD: When was the decision made to close the school?

MISS JAMES: I couldn't tell you the date exactly. It was the end of the '40-'41 term.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, did you not know you were not going to be in session the next year until that year ended?

MISS JAMES: It was along in the spring that we knew and expected it.

DR. CRAWFORD: What happened then after the closing to involve your staff? Where did the teachers go?

MISS JAMES: Well, they were pretty well scattered.
Most of them and I guess all of them [went]
to teacher institutions to teach in one capacity or another.

DR. CRAWFORD: What happened to the building and the property at the Wilson Dam School?

MISS JAMES: Later I understood it was made into apartments and became an apartment house. I don't know what the status of it is right now. I haven't been back to Wilson Dam for several years but I am going soon.

DR. CRAWFORD: I am sure it will be an interesting trip.

MISS JAMES: I still have friends there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Your teachers had mainly masters degrees?

MISS JAMES: All of them.

DR. CRAWFORD: The fact that they went into teaching in teachers' institutions of education speaks well for their experience.

MISS JAMES: Well, they were very well prepared.

DR. CRAWFORD: I am sure that that was another way the lessons developed there were put into use.

MISS JAMES: Oh yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you close the school in the summer of 1941?

MISS JAMES: Yes, at the end of the school term.

DR. CRAWFORD: What happened to all the educational materials, such as library, textbooks and so forth?

MISS JAMES: Well, a little of that was distributed to other TVA schools. We had many lovely pictures that we had collected and I remember seeing them at Fontana Dam School--some of them. We distributed them everywhere. Those materials were used. They weren't put in warehouses.

DR. CRAWFORD: And after that your experience with TVA was in the TVA office in Knoxville?

MISS JAMES: Yes. By the way I want to emphasize, however, that TVA provided us with a lot of scrap lumber and the teachers and children built a lot of things. You see, that was another experience which involved planning and measuring and having the satisfaction of something to add to the facilities of the room, and made the room more comfortable and liveable. Another thing which they did was to build a lot of playground equipment--very simple but sturdy. If you see the Wilson Dam Film you will see some of that equipment in use. That saved a lot of expense and at the same time we did have some purchased material, but it was interesting to show how those things can be acquired with a little effort and at little expense if you really try to do it. We liked to work that way. The teachers had a great deal of imagination and competence in building things.



DR. CRAWFORD: When did you move from there to Knoxville?

MISS JAMES: At that time my family home was in Knoxville and I moved as soon as that could be arranged. I had lived with another teacher in one of the homes of Village 1. A little house with a couple of bedrooms, but very adequate. So I moved to my mother's home in Knoxville and that was my headquarters then.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where was your office in Knoxville and what were your duties there?

MISS JAMES: My office was in the Bankers Trust Building, or the Training Division, I should say rather. My duties there were first of all--my main responsibility--was a specialist in education methods. And then it became, I suppose you would say, a little broader as I gave more time to work with educational institutions in the Valley states. My title was changed to Specialist in Educational Relations. I had a great privilege working with the educators there of the Valley area.

DR. CRAWFORD: What were your duties in this new position?

MISS JAMES: Well, a great deal of conference work, advisory work, arranging conferences. We arranged some national conferences and I remember one was a conference for Directors of Student Teaching and was arranged at Tougaloo Teachers College in Western North Carolina. Of course, educators from all over the United States were there for that. Then, just before I left, with



the help of Mr. Wagoner, who was then in charge of transportation, we arranged for Associations for Supervision of Curriculum Development to have an experience going on a boat down the Mississippi River and stopping to study the TVA projects, meeting with the specialists at the various points on their stop. We considered that very helpful and very interesting. You see the emphasis all this time was resource-use education and how to bring the better use of resources into the educational programs. They applied everywhere, but particularly in our seven Valley states where TVA was working on improving living conditions.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you travel much in that work?

MISS JAMES: A great deal.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you travel?

MISS JAMES: By car a great deal. Sometimes by plane.

TVA had a plane depending on where there was a group needing to go where I needed to go. You see it was economically worked out. We used TVA cars a great deal and trains.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have any trouble or hardships of travel because of the wartime years?

MISS JAMES: I can't recall any very serious ones?

I suppose everybody felt hampered some, but I don't know that TVA had any trouble about gasoline.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have to travel outside the seven-state area?



MISS JAMES: To national meetings.

DR. CRAWFORD: And did your office remain in the same building throughout all this time?

MISS JAMES: Yes, I guess it did.

DR. CRAWFORD: With what people did you work most closely?

MISS JAMES: The Training Division. I was a part of the division. Dr. George Gant was head of it at the time that I was there. I failed to mention that I worked a great deal with our area educational officers. You see we had area educational officers in every one of the seven Valley states and I worked closely with them and I would meet them for instance, here in Alabama. I would meet the area educational officer here in Huntsville and then we would go to different projects and when an area educational officer would go first to a state I would go with him and introduce him to the educators in the various colleges and universities.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where were your area educational officer's stationed? Were they always in the state capital?

MISS JAMES: No, for instance, the one in Alabama was in Huntsville. Wherever there was a greater concentration of TVA activities I guess. I guess that was the way it was determined.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you remained there throughout all the 1940's?

MISS JAMES: Came in '41 and left in '50.

DR. CRAWFORD: Why did you leave in 1950?

MISS JAMES: The work was being terminated. That is when I came to the University of Alabama.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you went to the School of Education at the University of Alabama? Where you remained until retirement--to bring things up to date?

MISS JAMES: That is correct.

DR. CRAWFORD: What other aspects of your work in Knoxville should be included in this?

MISS JAMES: I don't know of anything specifically except working with the other people in the Training Division, for instance, with Miss Rothrock and the libraries with Mr. McGlothlin, with other members of the staff, and Mr. Daves, who was head of our Negro program.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was Mr. Herman Daves?

MISS JAMES: Have you interviewed him?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes. How well was the Negro program working at this time?

MISS JAMES: Well, I think it worked very well. I know nothing to the contrary. I think Mr. Daves gave it fine leadership.

DR. CRAWFORD: And remained there for quite some time, of course.

MISS JAMES: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: What about the general purposes of the Training Division? What were they in addition to your work at this time?

MISS JAMES: Oh I don't know that I could tell you that except that they felt responsible for stimulating the educational program throughout the Valley states and giving specific training to employees in various fields. I am afraid that I will probably leave out some of the very important points about the Training Division although I was a part of it.

DR. CRAWFORD: I have and will talk more to some of the people in that.

MISS JAMES: Have you seen Mr. Gant?

DR. CRAWFORD: I did meet him in Wisconsin a year ago.

MISS JAMES: I see. That's fine. You haven't seen Mr. McGlothlin I guess?

DR. CRAWFORD: No.

MISS JAMES: He's with the University of Louisville, but you did talk with John Ivy?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes. May I ask you the names of a few other people who might be expected to have information useful in the educational aspects of this?

MISS JAMES: Some of them are gone. Lars Ervy is gone,

Lucy Gage is gone. You can talk to Mazie Saffau at Peabody, Dr. Mazie Saffau.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was Dr. Saffau's work?

MISS JAMES: Professor of Education at Peabody.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was her work at the time?

MISS JAMES: Same.

DR. CRAWFORD: Also, I want to talk to Dr. McGlothlin.

MISS JAMES: I think that would be a good idea. I would like for you to interview Dr. Tidwell here.

He lives here. He is the former superintendent of schools of Alabama.

DR. CRAWFORD: I tried to get two more of these.

Do you have the spelling of his name there?

MISS JAMES: Mc-G-L-O-T-H-L-I-N

DR. CRAWFORD: William, I believe?

MISS JAMES: Yes. William J.

DR. CRAWFORD: And he is now Vice President of University of Louisville?

MISS JAMES: University of Louisville. You didn't interview Sy Houle at the University of Chicago, did you?

DR. CRAWFORD: No, I did not.

MISS JAMES: He acted as a consultant with us. We were very fortunate to bring in consultants to the Training Division for help. We had many conferences at Knoxville

with different areas of interest and different groups of people. I was trying to think about other people in Alabama that you could confer with. I haven't thought that through.

DR. CRAWFORD: What else should we cover about your work in Knoxville? I know that is sort of an epilogue to the school work.

MISS JAMES: I think we have pretty well covered it. It was a pretty broad responsibility. The big thing was to help promote resource-use education.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you able to convince people of the importance of that idea?

MISS JAMES: Oh yes, they weren't hard to convince. I think many of them felt it very strongly.

MISS JAMES: You see the term "resource-use education" followed conservation. It implies a little broader action.

DR. CRAWFORD: And certainly fitted into TVA's program.

MISS JAMES: Yes it did. So that was the term we used.

DR. CRAWFORD: And that was the major objective of your work in Knoxville?

MISS JAMES: That's true other than the supervision of the educational programs in the various schools.

DR. CRAWFORD: TVA schools?

MISS JAMES: TVA schools or the schools that we had where our children were attending school.

We had some advisory responsibility.

DR. CRAWFORD: In other words where a TVA project was under way and you had personnel?

MISS JAMES: Like at Fontana, Gilbertsville, and the later dams you see. Hiwassee.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you construct any more schools of your own?

MISS JAMES: No. We participated in the construction of the Hebron School or to an extent financially.

That school was built to meet needs of that area. Of course, it met not only the needs of TVA children which were there at Gilbertsville, at the dam village, but also the children of the area. That's the way we wanted to be.

DR. CRAWFORD: So you concentrated on strengthening the local schools.

MISS JAMES: That's a good term to say "strengthening".

DR. CRAWFORD: What sort of assistance did you give the schools?

MISS JAMES: Well, I am sure there was some financial assistance. I can't be specific about that, but it was mainly advisory and working with the group of teachers and



improving instruction. That sort of thing. We found it very cooperative working with superintendents of schools. They were all very cooperative.

DR. CRAWFORD: TVA was generally welcomed in the Valley at the time?

MISS JAMES: I think so. I never did feel that it wasn't.

DR. CRAWFORD: I want to make a couple of conclusions and you can tell me if they are correct.

One of them is that the initial purpose was to educate . . .

MISS JAMES: To take care of the history of those children.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who were children of employees of TVA.

MISS JAMES: Correct.

DR. CRAWFORD: And that was accomplished from grade 1 to 6 that you maintained at different times.

MISS JAMES: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: The second purpose which may not have been apparent at the beginning but that TVA seemed to value was providing a laboratory for a display area for new ideas in education that might influence the education of the region as a whole.

MISS JAMES: That is true.

DR. CRAWFORD: I conclude that was done through the evidence of the visitors that you had, their reactions through the action of

your staff and the teaching in the area, to say nothing of your valuable work.

MISS JAMES: Well, I hope so.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, thank you Miss James.





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